

Message Text

MRN: 1978HONG K010848 SEGMENT NUMBER: 000001 ERROR READING TEXT INDEX

FILE; TELEGRAM TEXT FOR THIS SEGMENT IS UNAVAILABLE

ADP902

SECRET

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05

H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02

SS-15 ICA-11 ACDA-12 HA-05 AID-05 TRSE-00 OMB-01

(ISO) W

-----043058 111122Z /11

R 110255Z AUG 78

FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2468

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USLO PEKING

AMEMBASSY SEOUL

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

CINCPAC

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CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

COULD INVITE FURTHER DISASTER. AT THE EXTREME THERE WAS THE DANGER OF ARMED CONFLICT WITH ALWAYS THE POSSIBILITY OF SOVIET INTERVENTION ON VIETNAM'S BEHALF. A MORE LIKELY SCENARIO AS TENSIONS GREW WOULD BE THE INTRODUCTION OF A DETERRENT SOVIET PRESENCE INTO VIETNAM, BRINING ING FURTHER DAMAGE TO CHINA'S STRATEGIC POSITION AND FACING IT WITH THE DIFFICULT CHOICE OF BACKING OFF OR TESTING SOVIET RESOLVE.

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5. IN PONDERING THESE DISCONCERTING FACTORS, PEKING MAY HAVE ALSO TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT THAT WHILE FAR FROM CAVING IN BEFORE THE CHINESE ONSLAUGHT, THERE WERE SOME SIGNS OF HANOI SENSITIVITY TO

CHINESE PRESSURE AND CONCERN. HAVING BY THEN PROBABLY SORTED OUT RUMOR FROM FACT, PEKING'S RELIEF OVER THE LACK OF ANY SUBSTANCE TO STORIES ABOUT SOVIET BASES IN VIETNAM WAS PROBABLY ENHANCED BY HANOI'S PUBLIC AVOWALS THAT IT HAD NO INTENTION OF ALLOWING FOREIGN BASES TO BE ESTABLISHED ON ITS SOIL. MORE SPECULATIVELY, CHINA MIGHT HAVE DERIVED SOME COMFORT FROM THE SRV'S ANXIETY TO NORMALIZE RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. AS AN INDICATION THAT HANOI WAS INTERESTED IN INTRODUCING AN OFFSETTING FACTOR TO ITS HEAVY RELIANCE ON THE SOVIETS.

6. IT SEEMS EVIDENT THAT ENOUGH OF THESE FACTORS WERE AT WORK TO MODERATE CHINA'S COURSE ON THE OVERSEAS CHINESE. ONE SIGN OF THIS WAS PEKING'S RESURRECTION OF THE EARLIER VIETNAMESE PROPOSAL TO HOLD TALKS ON THE ISSUE AT THE VICE FOREIGN MINISTERIAL LEVEL. ANOTHER WAS THE CLOSURE OF THE BORDER TO REFUGEES WHICH CONVEYED THE MESSAGE TO VIETNAM'S OVERSEA CHINESE THAT THEY HAVE TO MAKE THE BEST OF THE SITUATION IN PLACE AND THEREBY SIGNALED A REDUCED CHINESE INVOLVEMENT IN THE FATE OF THESE PEOPLE.

7. WHILE THE OUTCOME OF THE TALKS WHICH HAVE JUST GOTTEN UNDERWAY APPEARS UNCERTAIN PEKING'S MORE RESTRAINED STANCE HAS CONSIDERABLY REDUCED THE CHANCES OF ARMED CONFLICT BETWEEN CHINA AND VIETNAM PROVOKED BY THE OVERSEAS CHINESE ISSUE.

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ONCE AGAIN THE CHINESE PENCHANT FOR PRUDENCE WHEN FACED WITH POTENTIAL CONFLICT WITH UNPREDICTABLE CONSEQUENCES SEEMS TO HAVE COME TO THE FORE.

8. WE INFER FROM THIS THE UNLIKELIHOOD OF AN ADVENTUROUS CHINESE COURSE ON CAMBODIA. WHILE THE DISTASTEFUL PROSPECT OF VIETNAMESE DOMINATION OF CAMBODIA WILL PROMPT CONTINUED CHINESE ASSISTANCE TO THE POL POT GOVERNMENT, IT SEEMS DOUBTFUL THAT CHINA IS OF A MIND TO RISK ITS AMBITIOUS RECONSTRUCTION EFFORT AND THE PEACE IT ENJOYS FOR THE SAKE OF AN OBVIOUSLY SHAKY REGIME WHOSE CONTROL BY VIETNAM WOULD AT LEAST IN THE MEDIUM TERM ADD ONLY marginally TO THE STRATEGIC THREAT NOW PERCEIVED FROM THE SOUTH.

9. IN ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENTS OF THE PAST FEW MONTHS ON SINO-VIETNAM RELATIONS, A CONTRADICTORY NOTE EMERGES. THE HARD FEELINGS AROUSED BY THE OVERSEAS CHINESE ISSUE HAVE

UNDOUBTEDLY EXACERBATED THE STRAIN BETWEEN THE
TWO AND MADE RECONCILIATION AN EVEN MORE REMOTE
POSSIBILITY. AND YET THE SEEMINGLY AVERTED CRISIS
APPEARS TO HAVE FORCED BOTH SIDES TO TAKE A CLEARER
LOOK AT WHERE THEY WERE HEADING. FOR THE CHINESE,
THE APPARENT LESSON IS THE NEED TO ACHIEVE A POSTURE
WHICH WHILE WORRYING VIETNAM INTO A MORE
ACCOMMODATING POSITION WOULD AVOID FORCING IT
MORE DEEPLY AND PERHAPS IRRETRIEVABLY INTO THE SOVIET
EMBRACE. AS FOR VIETNAM, RECENT EVENTS MAY HAVE
CONVINCED IT OF THE WISDOM OF GREATER CAUTION ON
MATTERS TOUCHING IMPORTANT CHINESE INTERESTS.
SHOESMITH

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NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: n/a
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 11 aug 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978HONGK10848
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: RR
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: n/a
Format: TEL
From: HONG KONG
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780870/aaaacglt.tel
Line Count: 128
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Message ID: 7cc48264-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags: ANOMALY
Review Date: 20 apr 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1759130
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: n/a
TAGS: n/a
To: SECSTATE WASHDC BANGKOK MULTIPLE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/7cc48264-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014